

THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Twelfth Report



December 1981

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**TWELFTH REPORT
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**This Report has been prepared by the staff of the
Federal Voting Assistance Program, Office of the
Secretary of Defense, Washington, D.C.**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) office coordinates and discharges the Federal responsibilities assigned to the 'Presidential Designee (Secretary of Defense) under the Federal Voting Assistance' Act of 1955, as amended, and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975, as amended. This report covers the period 1978 through 1980.

It is significant to note the improvements by comparing Presidential Election years of 1976 and 1980. At a time when voting participation by the general public decreased, military participation in voting increased by approximately 4% in 1980 to 49.7%. Overseas civilian participation in voting increased by 7% to 34.2%. In 1976 over 20% of the military and 29% of overseas civilians who attempted to vote were not able to do so because they received their ballot too late or did not receive it at all. In 1980, the percentage dropped to 9% for the military and 8% for overseas civilians.

Progress of States in Implementing the Acts

All states now accept the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form as a request for ballot when used by members of the Armed Forces. Also, all states provide specially marked, gummed and sized envelopes for absentee voting materials. This standard visual identification simplifies handling of balloting materials by the Postal Service. Thirty-four states now accept the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form as a simultaneous application for registration and absentee ballot. There are still some obstacles for absentee voters to overcome, such as oath requirements, ballot time restraints, and, in some cases, cumbersome state administrative procedures. These must be overcome to simplify the absentee voting process for all concerned.

Information Support

The 1980 election year marked the first time a coordinated worldwide campaign was conducted to inform individuals about their right to vote, how to vote, and the importance of their vote. This campaign was conducted in coordination with the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Advertising Council. Over \$25 million in time and space was contributed by U. S. media in support of this effort. Overseas media also participated in this campaign.

Survey of Local Election Officials

Local election officials in four hundred of the most populous counties and cities were surveyed. Five percent or more of the total vote was cast absentee. There was a mean increase of 20% in absentee voting for 51% of the districts surveyed. The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form was a frequent means of application for absentee ballots. The major problem in processing requests for absentee ballots was the lack of an adequate local home address on the application form. Local election officials noted the problems they experienced in processing the absentee ballot requests were brought about by the failure of voters to complete them in the proper manner.

Conclusions

- o There were increases in the frequency of absentee voting in 1980, as compared to 1976, in three of the five Service components as well as among Federal civilian employees and other civilians overseas.
- o The vast majority of local election officials reported that greater numbers of individuals cast absentee ballots in 1980 as compared to 1976.
- o The majority of those applying for absentee ballots used the Federal Post Card Application. Only a few of the unit voting officers indicated they had insufficient quantities of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) available for distribution.
- o Although election officials cited a number of problems in processing FPCAs, the evidence available suggests that virtually all of the applications were processed.
- o A majority of voters indicated that they were satisfied with the information available concerning voting procedures.

Despite these positive signs, it is also clear that absentee voting is not, as yet, problem-free. The remaining problems are underscored by the following:

- o Twenty-five (25) percent of the military non-voters and 19% of the Federal civilian employee non-voters cited lack of knowledge concerning how to get a ballot as one reason they did not vote. Among other civilians overseas, lack of knowledge on getting a ballot, lack of a state residence for voting, and thinking that one was ineligible to vote were cited most often as reasons for not voting.
- o Large numbers of voting assistance officers cited long delays between application for and receipt of ballot and a total lack of response to applications for a ballot as problems experienced by those trying to vote in 1980.
- o Nearly 25% of the local election officials indicated that ballots were mailed out in the third week of October, just about two weeks before the election.

Problem Areas

Two major problem areas in the absentee voting process have surfaced. First, many individuals do not seem to know what their rights are in regard to voting and/or do not seem to know how to exercise these rights. Three factors converge to create this situation:

- a) Many citizens make little effort to seek information and assistance in this regard.
- b) It is also possible that some individuals were simply never informed of their voting rights and how they could exercise them. This is likely to be true for those Americans living overseas who are not connected with the Federal government or American businesses.
- c) The variety and complexity of state laws regarding residency undoubtedly make it difficult for many citizens (especially those who have moved frequently and/or have been away from the country for many years) to determine where they are eligible to vote, if in fact they are eligible. It is probable that if this barrier can be eliminated, it can only come about through legislative action.

The second problem area concerns late receipt of ballots. Two factors would explain this problem area:

- a) Applicants waited too long to submit their requests.
- b) Ballots were mailed too late by election officials.

Little evidence was found to indicate that unsuccessful applicants submitted their requests, as a group, later than those who voted absentee. There is evidence to support the contention that late mailing of ballots plays a role in this problem. Two weeks is not a long time when mailing intervals and time for completion and notarization of ballots are taken into account.

INTRODUCTION

This is the twelfth report since the enactment of the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 and covers the 1978 and 1980 General Elections.

The current program is based on the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 (FVAA) and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975 (OCVRA). The two Acts authorize the President to designate the head of a Federal department or agency to administer the Federal voting assistance responsibilities. The Secretary of Defense is the responsible designee for administering these Acts and the Director of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) carries out the functions of the program. Both Acts were amended on November 4, 1978, to improve the administration and operation of voting procedures for citizens covered by the FVAA and the OCVRA.

Both Acts require the states to allow certain citizens to register and vote in Federal elections using absentee procedures. These citizens include members of the Armed Forces and the Merchant Marine, their spouses and dependents; the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other U.S. citizens residing outside of the United States. In addition to the Federal laws governing absentee registration and voting, most states permit these citizens to register for and vote absentee in state and local elections.

Executive Branch departments and agencies with employees overseas conduct individual voting assistance programs and utilize the informational materials available from the Federal Voting Assistance Program. The Department of State, through its embassies and consulates, provides absentee voting information and assistance to U.S. citizens overseas. In addition, the State Department makes the diplomatic pouch available to voters for the transmission of election materials back to the U.S.

The U.S. Postal Service and the Military Postal Service facilitate the transmission of election materials between the voter and election jurisdiction.

The General Services Administration prints the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and makes distribution upon request from Federal departments and agencies.

The Attorney General is authorized to enforce the provisions of these Acts.

Federal Voting Assistance Program

The Federal Voting Assistance Program office maintains continuous contact with state and local election officials, assists states and other U.S. jurisdictions in adopting the mandatory and recommendatory provisions of the FVAA and the OCVRA, and advises them on the applicability of Federal laws and regulations to their individual electoral systems. An ombudsman service for all persons covered by the Acts and for local election officials is also provided to assist personnel in voting either in person or by absentee. The right of all U.S. citizens to register and vote is publicized to a worldwide audience on a continuous basis.

PROGRESS OF STATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1955, AS AMENDED, AND THE OVERSEAS CITIZENS VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1975, AS AMENDED.

State progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 (FVAA), as amended, and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975 (OCVRA), as amended, since the 11th Biennial Report, has been encouraging. Broad generalizations on absentee registration and voting procedures followed by the states would be misleading. Regulation of the conduct of elections, registration and voting have traditionally been left to the states. This has resulted in a multitude of different election systems -- each reflecting the state's own approach to the election process. Some systems are extremely open and simple while others are extremely restrictive and cumbersome. Some treat all absentees in the same manner and others contain distinctions and classifications of voters which appear to be unnecessary or irrational. In addition, there are inconsistencies and irregularities within the electoral systems of some states.

These inconsistencies in procedures among the states and lack of uniformity of treatment of people within the states is a problem in administering the Federal Voting Assistance Program. In the first instance the lack of uniformity of procedures among the states presents problems to voting assistance officers and counselors throughout the world. Familiarity with the procedures of one state provides no basis of knowledge for assisting voters from another state; in fact, knowledge of one state's procedures may mislead a person in dealing with another state's procedure.

The lack of uniformity of procedures within a state causes even more confusion. Local election officials do not always understand that different procedures apply and therefore give erroneous advice to voters or require that more rigorous procedures be followed than are necessary. Voters in the same family (i.e., military person and spouse) may not follow the same procedures to register and vote. The voters and voting assistance officers or counselors are understandably confused by the lack of uniformity.

With respect to adopting the requirements of the OCVRA into state law, states have done everything from enacting specific legislation to "deeming" overseas citizen voters to be included in one of the groups of citizens already permitted to register and vote absentee under state law.

Enactment of the 1978 amendments to the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975 (Pub. L. 95-593), and the revisions in the Federal Post Card Application form made pursuant thereto, have simplified registration and voting procedures in many states.

Problems remain, nevertheless, in two important areas. First, the requirement under many state laws for an oath on election-related materials has been particularly burdensome to civilians voting from overseas.

Second, the short period between the time when absentee ballots become available for mailing and the date of the election effectively disenfranchises many would-be absentee voters. Additional legislation is necessary on a state-by-state basis in order to remove the barriers to absentee registration and voting still faced by various categories of people addressed by the two Acts.

The specific recommendations contained in the FVAA and the OCVRA have been incorporated into state law as follows:

(1) ACCEPT THE FEDERAL POST CARD APPLICATION (FPCA) AS AN APPLICATION FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS UNDER SUCH STATE'S ABSENTEE BALLOTING LAWS, AS APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION UNDER SUCH STATE ELECTION LAWS, AND AS SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO IMPLEMENT STATE ABSENTEE BALLOTING LAWS.

All states will accept the FPCA as a request for absentee ballot when used by members of the Armed Forces. However, a few states still require that their own absentee ballot request form be used by some or all other persons covered by the FVAA and the OCVRA.

The FPCA is less widely accepted as the request for registration by the states. Some states still require that their own state form be used to complete registration even when used by members of the Armed Forces. In most cases the state registration form and an absentee ballot will be sent in response to a request made with the FPCA.

(2) WAIVE REGISTRATION OF PERSONS COVERED BY THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1955, WHO, BY REASON OF THEIR SERVICE, HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO REGISTER:

Few states waive registration for any category of voter covered under the FVAA or the OCVRA. What has evolved in some states is a dual system: one of permanent registration and the other temporary registration. On the one hand, permanent registration may be accomplished by some or all of the persons covered by the two Acts. The form for permanent registration may be by a state form or the FPCA depending upon state law.

Collateral to the system of permanent registration is the more limited system of temporary registration which may be for one election only or for an entire year. In most instances, the FPCA is accepted as the instrument for temporary registration. It is also a characteristic of temporary registration in that it is limited usually to those citizens covered by the FVAA and the OCVRA.

(3) ACCEPT THE FPCA AS A SIMULTANEOUS APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION AND ABSENTEE BALLOT:

This recommendation is followed in its purest sense by only a few states. What is done, in fact, is that a single FPCA will be accepted as a request for a state-prescribed registration form and for an absentee ballot. The registration form will be sent to the person as soon as the request is received and the absentee ballot will be sent as soon as it is possible. The date for return of the state form varies among the states.

Some of the states require that the state form be returned before the close of registration (in the majority of cases this is approximately 30 days before the election), while other states will accept the state form if returned with the absentee ballot.

(4) IF SPECIAL APPLICATION IS REQUIRED FOR REGISTRATION BY MAIL, PROVIDE THAT THE NECESSARY FORMS WILL BE SENT WITH THE ABSENTEE BALLOT AND MAY BE RETURNED WITH IT.

As noted in the comments to recommendation (3) above, some states follow this procedure; however, these states are in the minority.

(5) MAKE PROVISIONS FOR PERSONS ELIGIBLE TO REGISTER AND QUALIFIED TO VOTE, WHO HAVE BEEN HONORABLY DISCHARGED FROM THE ARMED FORCES, OR HAVE TERMINATED THEIR SERVICE OR EMPLOYMENT, TOO LATE TO REGISTER AT THE TIME WHEN, AND AT THE PLACE WHERE, REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED, TO VOTE AT THE ELECTION NEXT ENSUING AFTER SUCH DISCHARGE OR TERMINATION.

Most all states have some form of procedure to permit voting for these persons.

(6) AUTHORIZE AND INSTRUCT THE STATE OR LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS, UPON RECEIPT OF THE POST CARD APPLICATION PROVIDED PURSUANT TO THIS SUB-CHAPTER, TO MAIL IMMEDIATELY TO THE APPLICANT A BALLOT, INSTRUCTIONS FOR VOTING AND RETURNING THE BALLOT, AND A SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE.

All absentee ballots are mailed as soon as they have been printed and are available. This varies from state to state and even within the states; however, they are mailed usually between 20 and 30 days before an election. A few states, however, will not accept applications for absentee ballots prior to a specified number of days before the election, a fact which may be a problem to some voters.

(7-9) PROVIDE SPECIALLY MARKED, GUMMED AND SIZED ENVELOPES FOR ABSENTEE VOTING MATERIAL.

All states provide for specially marked ballot transmission envelopes and election related material. The size and weight of balloting material, however, varies substantially from state to state depending upon the style of absentee ballot used and the number of candidates and issues on the particular ballots.

(10) AUTHORIZE OATHS REQUIRED BY STATE LAW TO BE ADMINISTERED AND ATTESTED BY ANY COMMISSIONED OFFICER IN THE ACTIVE SERVICE OF THE ARMED FORCES, ANY MEMBER OF THE MERCHANT MARINE OF THE UNITED STATES DESIGNATED FOR THIS PURPOSE BY THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE, THE HEAD OF ANY DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES, ANY CIVILIAN OFFICIAL EMPOWERED BY STATE OR FEDERAL LAW TO ADMINISTER OATHS, OR ANY CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE DESIGNATED BY ANY HEAD OF ANY DEPARTMENT OR AGENCY OF THE UNITED STATES.

All states permit oaths on election related material to be taken by officials other than state election officials. The categories of non-state officials who may take these oaths vary greatly from state to state. In some instances, there are variations within the state on who may administer oaths depending upon the category of absentee voter.

The variations, in most instances, involve the particular class or classes of officers who may take the oaths of absentee voters. Some states will accept an oath taken by any commissioned officer, while other states will limit their acceptance to those given by officers authorized by Federal law to take a person's oath. Furthermore, states vary the members of groups of people whose oaths may be taken by different classes of officials; i.e., military personnel and their families may have their oaths taken by one group of people and overseas citizens another group.

It should be noted that the requirement that a person's oath be taken by an official, and not allowed to be self-administered, presents an obstacle to absentee voting by non-military personnel voting from outside of the United States.

(11) INCLUDE IN STATE VOTING INSTRUCTIONS EXPRESS INFORMATION CONCERNING THE TYPE OR TYPES OF WRITING INSTRUMENTS WHICH MAY BE USED TO MARK THE ABSENTEE BALLOT, PREFERABLY PEN OR INDELIBLE PENCIL.

All states provide instructions for absentee voting. These instructions usually include the type of writing instrument to be used and the appropriate marks to be made on the ballot. The need for this recommendation has become somewhat outdated with the increased use of electronically counted ballots.

(12) PROVIDE THAT ABSENTEE BALLOTS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR MAILING TO THE APPLICANT AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE BEFORE THE LAST DATE ON SUCH BALLOT COUNTED.

All states now provide that absentee ballots be available prior to the election. However, in some cases, due to late primary run-off elections or court challenges to ballot access, ballots are not mailed until some date close to the election. In the past, the date of mailing of absentee ballots has presented a serious problem to voters and is the most significant problem which must be resolved.

(13) EACH OF THE SEVERAL STATES MAKE AVAILABLE TO THE PRESIDENTIAL DESIGNEE APPROPRIATE STATISTICAL DATA TO ASSIST HIM IN COMPILING COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATIONS UNDER THE FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Statistical data on absentee registration and voting which is compiled by the states is usually done in a form which is too general to be of use to the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Categories of absentee voters are not broken down between those who are covered by the FVAA and the OCVRA and those who are permitted to vote under provisions of state law or between those who vote "absentee" in their community prior to election day and those who vote absentee by mail.

(14) EACH OF THE SEVERAL STATES PERMIT ANY PERSON COVERED BY 42 U.S.C. 1973cc WHO IS OTHERWISE FULLY QUALIFIED TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN THE STATE TO ACQUIRE LEGAL RESIDENCE IN THE STATE, NOTWITHSTANDING HIS RESIDENCE ON A MILITARY INSTALLATION, AND TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS.

This recommendation has been superseded by the case of Evans v. Cornman, 396 U.S. 419, which requires that persons living on a Federal enclave may acquire residence and vote in the state in which the Federal enclave is located.

However, even with this decision local election officials in some instances may not permit members of the Armed Forces or others to vote in the community in which the military installation is located. Denial of the right to register and vote where a person is stationed is a situation which must be addressed and resolved on a case-by-case basis.

1978 VOTER PARTICIPATION

Voter participation decreased in 1978 elections as compared to the 1974 elections. In 1974, 18% of eligible military voters voted whereas 13.9% voted in 1978. A decrease in voter participation was also reflected by Federal civilian employees. In 1974, voter participation was 17.8% and, in 1978, 13% cast their ballots. Based on the 1978 Post-Election Survey, the primary explanation given for the decrease was apathy and lack of familiarity with candidates and issues.

Because of these facts, the Federal Voting Assistance Program office prepared an intensive campaign for the 1980 general election. The results of the 1980 Post-Election Survey prove this program is successful.

1980 INFORMATION SUPPORT PLAN

The voter outreach effort combined traditional communications techniques with emphasis placed upon the development of innovative approaches. Because of the worldwide dispersion of U.S. citizens, imaginative approaches to communicate the voting message had to be implemented to ensure that all citizens, no matter how isolated they may be from the mainstream of election year news, had available information as to their voting rights and the procedures to follow in exercising those rights.

Objectives and Methodology

Two objectives keyed all planning for support of the 1980 FVAP:

1. Develop a worldwide informational/motivational campaign to inform the 5-6 million member FVAP audience about their right to vote, how to vote, and the importance of their vote; incorporating lessons learned from the 1976 and 1978 Post-Election Voting Surveys.

2. Develop an informational training program for military and civilian voting assistance officers/counselors to inform them of their duties in assisting and motivating citizens to vote.

The method used to coordinate all voting awareness actions (commencing with the first primary election in February 1980 and ending with the Post-Election Voting Survey, following the November general election), was outlined in a four-phased sequential program schedule detailed in the 1980 Voting Action Plan and Information Support Plan.

The plan was implemented by all Defense components and by all other Federal agencies identified as having absentee voting responsibilities under the law.

A separate approach was developed with the State Department since the State Department, through its overseas posts, would be providing voting assistance services to other U.S. citizens residing abroad. It is more difficult to communicate with this audience because of the lack of a formal relationship which is in place in the Military Services and other government agencies.

While voting assistance links were being developed with government agencies, a similar voter information/assistance network was being initiated with participating non-government groups.

One of the innovative outreach efforts undertaken in 1980 was to identify and correspond with industry, clubs and associations, educational institutions and selected English language foreign publications that reach U.S. citizens overseas.

Several hundred U.S. corporations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, English language foreign publications and the two major U.S. political parties were invited to participate on a voluntary basis to assist and encourage overseas citizens to vote.

This effort was received extremely well and provided the FVAP with an important communication chain able to reach U.S. citizens no matter how globally isolated.

Once government and non-government channels of communication were established, a worldwide multi-media news release and information program commenced dissemination of voting assistance materials and information.

Voting Materials and Information Programs

Information programs and support materials developed and prepared for the 1980 program were designed with the emphasis on providing clear and concise voting information.

The key document of voting information (in addition to the Federal Post Card Application-FPCA), was the 1980 Voting Assistance Guide. The Guide served as the source "handbook" containing state-by-state voting procedures, detailed information on developing local voter assistance programs and a review of support material available to voting assistance personnel. Appendices were also provided covering such topics, as the 1980 election calendar, probability of state tax liability and the laws protecting absentee voting.

Other materials developed to support the program were:

1. Voting Information Fact Sheets
2. Voting News Releases
3. Posters (Motivational and Informational)
4. American Forces Radio and Television (AFRTS) Announcements
5. 1980 Federal/State Elected Officials Brochure

Additionally, three (3) special techniques were developed to highlight particular phases in the 1980 election year:

1. Voting Slogan Contest. Six months before the start of the election year, a worldwide voting slogan contest was held to find a slogan that would key the 1980 media campaign. This contest was an effective technique used to bring the subject of voting to the audience in late 1979 as a reminder that 1980 was a general election year.
2. Armed Forces Voters Week - (September 8-15, 1980). This event marked the traditional shift in emphasis from registering and voting in the primary elections to registering and voting in the November general election. Military voting assistance personnel conducted community awareness programs emphasizing participation in the November general election. Military communities held local parades, band concerts and manned registration and voting assistance booths to assist personnel and their families in completing absentee voting forms. Other government and private organizations were also encouraged to hold similar activities.
3. Advertising Council/National Association of Secretaries of State/FVAP Joint Voting Campaign. A plan was developed to coordinate the efforts of commercial media outlets in the U.S. by co-sponsoring a national "Get Out The Vote" campaign with the National Association of Secretaries of State and the Advertising Council of America. The Council prepared and distributed multimedia materials to radio, television, newspaper and magazine outlets across the U.S. The materials were also integrated into the internal DoD media campaign and were further distributed to other participating overseas media outlets. This program was extremely successful, resulting in more than \$25 million in advertising time and space contributed by U.S. media. It is the first time a coordinated, worldwide campaign to get out the vote has been conducted.

Information Program Results

Analysis of the 1980 Post-Voting Survey along with information received from various government and non-government groups clearly indicated that the 1980 program was an extraordinary success -- more people than ever before voted by absentee ballot.

An insight into the effectiveness of the methods used to disseminate news and information was also measured by the significant amount of mail received from citizens around the world.

Further effectiveness of program success was received on a continual basis by random sampling of worldwide voting assistance personnel to determine if information was being received and understood. This method also enabled the FVAP to determine where, if any, information difficulties or other problems existed.

Letters referencing articles that appeared in corporate, organizational and English language foreign publications further revealed that voting information was being published.

Local election officials were also contacted to evaluate flow of information and materials. In all instances officials reported significant increases and pointed out that they were receiving more correctly submitted requests for registration and ballots than in past years.

The results indicate the 1980 media and information program forged a significant permanent link enabling future FVAP efforts to reach the more than 5 million member absentee audience through an established communications network that will bring the voting message to American citizens no matter how far they may be from home.

POST ELECTION SURVEY

A survey of military personnel, federally employed civilians assigned overseas, and of other U.S. citizens overseas was conducted to provide statistical data on the frequency of absentee voting among these populations; to determine which problems/barriers were evident in the absentee voting process in 1980; to determine the sources of information and assistance concerning absentee voting used by these individuals and the usefulness of the information/assistance; and to determine if non-voting was a result of barriers to absentee voting as opposed to a choice on the part of the individual.

Unit Voting Officers and local election officials were also surveyed to gather information on the functioning of the program, to determine problems experienced in processing FPCAs, and to obtain suggestions for improvement of the program.

Voting Action — 1980 (Percentages)

<u>Voting Action</u>	<u>Army</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Marine Corps</u>	<u>Air Force</u>	<u>Coast Guard</u>	<u>Total Services</u>	<u>Federal Civilian Employees</u>	<u>OCVRA Civilian</u>
Absentee	26.6	29.5	33.0	41.4	31.7	32.0	45.9	25.6
In-person	6.2	9.8	5.1	10.9	20.0	8.8	1.8	.8
Tried to Vote Absentee	9.1	8.6	11.2	8.2	5.5	8.9	9.9	7.8
Total Voting/ Attempting to Vote	41.9	47.9	49.3	60.5	57.2	49.7	57.7	34.2
Didn't Vote	58.1	52.0	50.6	39.5	42.8	50.5	42.3	65.7

The Voting Action table above provides a breakdown of voting behavior by the various groups surveyed. Examination of these results reveals a fairly consistent pattern with the exception of the relatively higher incidence of absentee voting among Federal civilian employees and Air Force personnel, and the great frequency with which Coast Guard personnel voted in person. The latter result is to be expected in that members of the Coast Guard are primarily stationed within the U.S., thereby allowing for registration and voting in the district where they are assigned.

The explanation for the greater frequency with which Air Force personnel voted may be related to the greater numbers of officers in that Service. Officers voted in substantially greater numbers than did enlisted personnel.

The fact that Federal civilian employees voted absentee in such large numbers may be related to the age factor. These civilians are older as a group than the military respondents; older individuals tend to vote in greater numbers than do younger people; therefore, these civilians were more likely to vote than were military personnel.

The percentage of voting by OCVRA civilians is substantially lower than military personnel or Federal civilian employees. However, it represents a significant increase (6%) over 1976 voting action. It should also be noted that OCVRA civilians usually have more obstacles to overcome to vote absentee.

Reasons For Not Voting

The following is a list of basic reasons given for not voting:

Reasons For Not Voting

Reason	Military	Federal Civilian Employees	OCVRA Civilians
Didn't know about election	0.8	0.3	1.9
Not interested in election	12.4	5.5	4.2
No candidate preference	40.3	39.4	19.8
Not familiar with candidates and issues	12.4	5.8	7.8
Didn't know how to get a ballot	25.5	19.1	47.7
Requested but didn't receive ballot*	1.2	0.9	0.2
Received ballot too late to vote*	1.4	0.3	0.3
Didn't think I was eligible	4.7	9.0	23.3
No state of residence	6.9	24.9	30.8
Tax implications	4.1	24.6	7.9
Discouraged by past attempts	10.0	14.5	9.9
Vote wouldn't matter	14.7	12.8	10.3
Other reason	36.3	20.3	17.4

*These individuals previously indicated that they had not, in fact, applied for a ballot.

The response marked by the largest percentage of military and Federal civilian employee non-voters was "had no candidate preference." Among Federal civilian employees "no state of residence," "possible effect of voting on tax obligation," and "other" were the most frequently cited responses. These four categories account for 62% of all responses given by civilians.

Among military non-voters three other responses (besides no candidate preference) were among the most frequently cited: "Other," "didn't know how to get a ballot," and "my vote wouldn't matter." These four response categories account for 68% of all responses given by military personnel.

The reasons cited with greatest frequency by OCVRA civilians were "didn't know how to get a ballot," "no state of residence," "didn't think I was eligible," and "no candidate preference."

Sources of Information and Assistance Used in Voting Absentee

Over 80% of the military personnel, Federal civilian employees and their dependents used the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to apply for their ballot. Ninety percent of the military voters obtained their cards through military channels, while approximately 46% of the Federal civilian employees reported this to be their source. Over 75% of both Federal civilian employees and military voters reported applying for their ballots between the first week in September and the third week in October. The median number of days between application for and receipt of ballot was 32 for military voters and 40 for Federal civilian employees. Over 80% of military and Federal civilian employee voters indicated that the oath presented no problem for them in voting absentee.

Over 70% of OCVRA civilians who applied for an absentee ballot used the Federal Post Card Application for this purpose. Nearly 80% of those obtained it at an embassy. Approximately one-third of those requesting a ballot submitted their request during the month of September. There was a rather substantial difference between voters and those who received their ballot too late to vote in regard to the median number of days between application and receipt: 45 days for voters and 60 days for those receiving their ballot late. Approximately 80% of OCVRA civilians indicated that the requirement for a notarized oath was not a barrier to their voting, however, approximately 24% encountered some difficulty in meeting the requirement for a notarized oath.

The largest percentage of military and Federal civilian employees either did not need voting assistance or obtained it from the Unit Voting Officer. Approximately one-third of the military and 22 percent of the Federal civilian employee voters used the Voting Assistance Guide directly. Over 80% of both groups of voters were satisfied with the information available.

The U.S. media and family/friends were rated as useful by sizable percentages of OCVRA civilians overseas, both in providing information on voting procedures and candidates and issues. Nearly half of the OCVRA civilians rated the embassy as a useful source of information on voting procedures. Approximately 31% of the applicants used the Voting Assistance Guide, while 7% indicated that they had contacted the Federal Voting Assistance Program Office.

Interest in Election

Eighty percent of the military voters and 87% of the Federal civilian employee voters said they were very interested in the election. Relationships between rank and interest and age and interest were noted. Approximately 92% of OCVRA civilians who voted absentee said they were very interested in the election.

Dependent Voting

Over 80% of both Federal civilian employees and military voters had at least one dependent eligible to vote and in over 80% of these cases, that dependent did vote. Seventy-nine percent of the civilian dependents of OCVRA civilians cast a ballot in the 1980 general election.

LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS

A survey of local election officials was also conducted to determine their problems with absentee voting and ways to overcome them. The information collected also provides an indication of progress made in overcoming the difficulties in the absentee process. Because the primary concern of the Federal Voting Assistance Program is absentee voters, a major criterion for inclusion in the sample of local election officials was the amount of experience they had with processing absentee registration and ballot requests. It was assumed that those with the most experience would be able to provide more information concerning problems associated with absentee voting.

A list of counties, arranged by size of population, was used as the sampling frame, with the 400 largest chosen for the sample. The assumption underlying this method was that the larger the population, the greater the number of registered voters and, in all probability, the greater the number of absentee voters.

Number of Absentee Votes Cast 1976-1980

According to statistics provided by the Bureau of the Census, about 89% of the registered voters nationwide cast ballots in the 1980 general election.

The percentage of absentee votes of the total number of votes cast in the jurisdictions surveyed in the 1980 general elections is shown below:

Percentage of Absentee Votes of Total Votes Cast		
Percent	Number of Jurisdictions	Percent of Jurisdictions
0-4	106	46.7
5-9	108	47.6
10-14	12	5.3
15-20	1	.44

In 51% of the districts surveyed, 5% or more of the total vote was cast absentee. These percentages are substantial, and considering the results of many of the elections held in this country, these votes could obviously be quite influential in determining the outcome. The mean result of this analysis is 5.2%.

The numbers of absentee votes cast in these jurisdictions in 1976 are slightly lower than in 1980. The following table indicates the percentage of differences:

Percentage Increase-Decrease in Frequency of Absentee Voting in 1980 Over 1976		
Percentage Increase-Decrease	Number of Jurisdictions	Percent of Jurisdictions
- 26-50	4	1.94
- 1-25	16	7.77
0	4	1.94
+ 1-25	109	52.91
+ 26-50	63	30.58
+ 51-75	6	2.91
+ 76-100	4	1.94
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Over half of the respondents reported that the number of absentee votes cast in 1980 represented a 1-25% increase over the number cast in 1976. The greatest decrease was 51%; the largest increase was 90%. Overall, there was a mean increase of 20%.

Federal Post Card Application (FPCA)

Since the 1980 elections were the first where the new FPCA form was used, questions were asked about the FPCA, two of which requested statistical data: how many FPCA ballot requests were received, and how many of these were they unable to process.

Election officials reported receiving anywhere from 0 to 8,000 FPCA ballot requests. The mean number received was 1,010 with a median of 500. If the assumption is made that all FPCA requests processed resulted in the ballot being mailed to the applicant (those picking up their ballots having used some other application), then the number of FPCA requests can be expressed as a percentage of the number of ballots mailed. This would provide some indication of the relative frequency of FPCA requests as compared to all requests to have ballots mailed. Not all individuals applying for a ballot are eligible to use the FPCA. For the most part, non-military voters residing within the U.S. but away from their voting district must use another form of application.

The table below represents the percentage of ballots mailed which were requested with the FPCA:

Percentage of Ballots Mailed Which Were Requested With FPCA		
Percent	Number of Jurisdictions	Percent of Jurisdictions
0-9	50	23.7
10-19	68	32.2
20-29	44	20.8
30-39	20	9.5
40-49	12	5.7
50-75	14	6.6
Over 75	3	1.4

The range of the results of this analysis is 0% to 95%, with a mean of 22% and a median of 17.5%. Given the generally high incidence of absentee voting in the jurisdictions sampled, it appears that the FPCA was a frequent means of application.

Problems Experienced in Processing FPCAs

Problem Experienced	Percent of All Responses	Percent of Respondents
Requested early/late	7.6	18.5
Inadequate home address	31.4	76.6
No birthdate	2.4	5.9
Illegible	6.3	15.3
Form incomplete	5.5	13.5
No Social Security number	.7	1.8
7D Misleading/confusing	4.3	10.4
No party preference	5.2	12.6
Item 9 confusing	0.6	1.4
Item 10 confusing	1.8	4.5
Inadequate/illegible mailing address	6.3	15.3
No precinct and/or ward	0.7	1.8
Not registered	4.4	10.8
Duplicate requests	1.5	3.6
Not signed	3.1	7.7
Not witnessed	10.5	25.7
Mail slow	1.7	4.1
Sent to wrong jurisdiction	1.8	4.5
Miscellaneous	4.1	9.9

The table above lists the problems experienced by the local election officials in processing the FPCA.

A lack of proper home address accounts for 31.4% of all responses and was mentioned by nearly 77% of those responding to the questions. This is the most frequently mentioned problem.

The only other problem which comes close in frequency of being cited involves the lack of a notary or witness, which accounts for 10.5% of the responses and was mentioned by nearly 26% of the respondents.

With the exception of the responses grouped into the miscellaneous category and those concerning slow mail service, the remaining responses can be placed into one of three groups:

1. Applicant does not complete FPCA properly. Included here are the responses: fails to give proper home and/or mailing address, birth date, Social Security Number, party preference, precinct/ward, signature and/or witness; writes illegibly; and does not complete the FPCA generally.
2. Applicant does not follow required/recommended procedures for FPCA submission. Included here: mailed too early/late; not registered; duplicate applications; sent to wrong place.
3. Problems with the Federal Post Card Application itself, included: some items as being misleading/confusing.

With the data grouped in this fashion, it becomes immediately clear that the majority of the problems the local election officials experienced in processing FPCAs were caused by the applicant's failure to complete the necessary items, or doing so in an illegible manner. This general category accounts for 72.1% of the responses. Failure to follow procedures accounts for 15.3% of responses, and 6.7% of the responses concern problems with the FPCA itself.

This would seem to indicate that, from the local election official's point of view, the major problems experienced in processing these requests were brought about by the failure of the individual to complete the FPCA in a proper manner.

The final item on the survey of local election officials requested suggestions or comments regarding the FPCA or the Federal Voting Assistance Program. Only four categories stood out. These suggestions included: stress the need for proper address of residence; improve mail service and/or stress the need for early application; have voters apply for each election; and better education of the unit voting officer.